



## Episode 55

# Developing productive habits as a busy designer



**Mirjam: [00:00]**

Hello, everybody. Welcome to the Designer Discussions podcast. Today our guest is Ariana Lovato from Honeycomb Home Design in California, and we're thrilled to have her here to just shed some light on how she manages to be a busy business owner and mom and do so much marketing and PR on the side.

**Intro: [00:08]**

Welcome to the Designer Discussion Sessions podcast. Tune in each week where we discuss marketing, branding, PR and business advice for design professionals.

Are you ready to get serious about your marketing? We're opening the Designer Discussions Marketing Studio, a monthly series of indepth actionable content to guide your marketing, PR, and business development. We want to help you transform your business and elevate it to work with your dream clients.

**Ariana: (00:57)**

Hi, guys. Thank you so much for having me. I'm excited to be here. Mirjam, Maria, and Jason.

**Mirjam: (01:03)**

Yeah. And I could say so many more things about you, but I picked a couple that I think just really show how exceptional you are. It's like you were an NKBA 30 under 30, right. And you also were at 2021 as ID ones to watch.

**Ariana: (01:23)**

Yes. Maria nominated me, actually, for that. So that was all kudos to her. But yeah, that was an incredible honor to get that award and recognition, for sure.



### Mirjam: [01:30]

And I think that's one of the things that you have taken very seriously in terms of how you market your business and yourself. When you look at the list of accolades that you've amassed, it's really impressive. Considering you're very young. It's not like you've been in the business for 30 years. That'd be impossible. Tell us a little bit about how, as a young business owner, and you've been in business for a few years, and you're very successful, but tell us a little bit about how you view your marketing and PR and how you make it all fit together. You also have a young baby, so you're a very busy, busy woman.

### Ariana: (02:24)

Do you think life gets busy before kids? Just wait until you have a kid, and then it's like, what was I doing before? Because I just can't it's crazy. It's crazy, but you kind of just figure it out, honestly. And now time is this really valuable thing that you protect with everything that you have. And it's just like a time block. As much as I can. And I value my time so much more now because I see how quickly it goes with the baby, who's now Pierre is almost ten months, so it goes by so fast. But yeah. As far as marketing and PR, I learned very early on that in order to get business, you have to put yourself out there, and you can't be afraid or shy to do that. And I think with social media, some older clientele or older clients feel like I feel like I'm kind of bragging by putting my stuff out on social media so they stay away from it and I always thought of it differently. It's not necessarily bragging. It's showing like, hey, this is what I can do for you. And let me show you what a designer does. And let me show you the value that I can bring to you by showing these finished products projects, but also showing the process behind them so you can really understand and appreciate how much work goes into it. So just even my projects that I would not put on my portfolio now, when I first started, I put them everywhere, and I'm embarrassed of them now, but that's how I just wasn't afraid to put it out there because I thought, okay, I have nothing to lose. And if I'm going to do this and I'm going to start my own business, and if I'm going to give it everything that I have and risk everything that I have, then I need to really try, because if I fail, at least I know I tried.

**Ariana: (04:14)**

And that was just my mindset going into it. I started, honeycomb, when I was 25. I'm now going to be turning 32. And in that time, I've learned so much about being a business owner, running a team, managing clients and expectations. But I've never forgotten how important PR and marketing is. And that's been the biggest I think the biggest catalyst to our success is paying a lot of attention to that and dedicating time to it.

**Mirjam: (04:41)**

Yeah. And also as I was perusing your biography in preparation, and I know you pretty well, but let's see what she's all been up to. And I noticed that you have an education, formal education degree, not just in interior design, but also in business.

**Ariana: (04:59)**

Yeah, I got both degrees because I figured, okay, I need to know something about accounting. I need to know something about very helpful running a business that is going to help me not only manage the creative aspect of it, but also this business side that I think is a struggle for a lot of designers because we just don't tend to think that way. And it's been hard for me, too. But I've learned early on, like, the things that I am not good at doing, I hire out, at least I know how to do them, but I hire out bookkeeping and accounting because I know that that's not the best use of my time. Yeah, I don't want to reconcile my account. I know how to do it, and I look through my statements, but it is that time again. It's that valuable asset. How am I going to protect it as much as possible?

**Mirjam: (05:55)**

And you said something interesting about time blocking because we know from all of our conversations that we've had with designers and business owners, it's like people always feel like they don't have enough time. So realistically for you, and you have a team of people, but the marketing and the PR of it, you handle most of it yourself because you understand the importance of it. Do you block time in your calendar? And if so, how much time do you think you invest in marketing your business?

**Ariana: (06:41)**

I would say for social media that's something that I post on everyday and it's just easy for me.

**Mirjam: (06:43)**

So prolific.

**Ariana: (06:49)**

It's just easy. I don't know why. It's not a problem tik tok I got to figure that out still, but I'm not there yet. But Reels and Instagram and Facebook and LinkedIn, those are my main sources of gathering leads and just marketing our business, that's easy for me to do. And I can dedicate half an hour a day to those items because it's just quick. Throughout my day as I'm going through it, I'll take a quick video of a job site, I'll take a quick video of a presentation, I'll snap a picture here or there and then at the end of my day when baby goes to bed, I have half an hour of just like decompression time. My husband leaves me alone and I just catch up on everything and that's when I do my postings or first thing in the morning. And so yeah, about a half an hour a day to social media. And then on the weekend I usually try and spend one to 2 hours of time either updating portfolio images on my website. Putting together blog posts. Maybe planning my marketing strategy. Which I don't really have like a solid plan on it right now because I kind of go as I go. But I've been putting more effort into. Okay. What do I really want to be marketing this month? What's going to be important and starting to build a calendar for that. So I probably dedicate 2 hours on a Saturday for that. So I really don't spend a ton of time on marketing a week. But I think that goes to show you that you don't have to do that. Once it becomes a habit, it's a habit.

**Mirjam: (08:17)**

Yes, I think that's so crucial and whereas we always do advocate for planning, but I agree that you can also have analysis paralysis because you're just planning, planning, planning. And I've been guilty of this myself, but you're so good at just executing it, to implementing just consistently. And I think key of what you said is that it is part of your routine. It's not something that you do occasionally, but it's something that's part of how you run your business and you do it pretty much every single day. Even just a story for the amount of time.

**Ariana: (09:19)**

Yeah, I mean, I understand how important it is to be visible. Our clients now, when they come to us on our website, they have already stopped us on social media for sometimes months or years until they hire us. I would do the same thing whenever we go out to eat to a new restaurant. I am not going to go do a cold eating process at a restaurant. I'm going to research you. I'm going to go on Yelp. I'm going to look at real photos, and then I'll go to you. I'm treating a restaurant that seriously, imagine somebody hiring a designer who's going to be in your life for a year or two years of time. You're going to research them. And somebody that doesn't have a social media presence or doesn't post often, I would think, okay, well, what are they doing? Why is that not important to them?

**Maria: (09:47)**

I was going to say they're saying right now that 95% of the awareness of a business is occurring before you ever get a phone call. 95%.

**Ariana: (09:58)**

It's crazy. It just goes to show you, because I think people like you said, Miriam, get analysis paralysis. They want to be perfect. They don't want to post something that's not perfect. And I'm just like, Let all that go. I got to just put it out there because I think that's better than not doing anything.

**Mirjam: (10:16)**

And I think that's your recipe for success. And it works on the PR side, too. I've honestly very rarely worked with somebody where I say, okay, well, here's something for you. And after like, five minutes, it's done.

**Ariana: (10:31)**

Yeah, because I know my opportunity window. I'm like, okay, that'll take me like ten minutes time. I can just do it right now before my next call or before my next meeting, and then I get it done. It's not 100% perfect, but I know it's good enough and it can get out there and it will do its job. Otherwise, nothing would get done.

**Mirjam: (10:51)**

It's very true. It's very true. And because you are so productive and full of ideas, and you also have a passion for educating others in the industry, so you set up your own podcast a little while ago.

**Ariana: (11:19)**

And I did.

**Mirjam: (11:26)**

When you first said that to me, I'm like, oh, my God, I think she's crazy. Because we obviously know it's another project. It's another thing you have to commit yourself to do consistently. Tell us a little bit about what the impetus was for you to do that and how you're managing all of that in addition to everything else.

**Ariana: (11:37)**

Yeah, it was something that, as I was sitting at home for the two weeks of maternity leave that I had, which in all seriously, very generous, all the time I took, because when you run your own business, there is no maternity leave. But that's a separate topic. I just was kind of thinking, okay, what is something that I could be doing? Like, writing an ebook is something that is still a goal of mine to do, but that takes a lot of time to put out the content that I want. What is something that I can do a little bit more off the cuff and try and relate to our clients? But not only clients, also industry people as well. And I kept coming back to podcast. And the reason I started The Buzz by Honeycomb is because I wanted to put something out there that was educational for our clients or future clients, but also highlighted the industry and the people behind the curtain, like your electrician, your framer, your painter. What do they have to say? They're rarely put on a pedestal and spoken to like an expert, which they should be. And we have such a labor shortage, and there's just an underappreciation for those trades that I wanted to talk to them and then provide insight to clients on, okay, these are the types of questions you should be asking your electrician, or these are things that you should think about before you hire one. And my strategy behind this was, okay, I'm delivering service to our clients, but also I'm building trust with them because they know that I'm knowledgeable enough in the field as we're talking through this, that they'll trust me during their project. And so it just was kind of a two fold way of continuing to build the brand, but also serve our audience and relate to members of the industry as well.

**Mirjam: (13:26)**

And you're already at I think your third episode just went live, didn't yeah.

**Ariana: (13:37)**

We put out I have two more that are being edited right now, and it's just I mean, it's a lot of freaking work, but I'm having fun doing it. But, yeah, it's a lot of work. I have somebody we can relate. Yeah, it's a lot to do, and you want to make sure that the conversation flows and all of that. So I am picking people that I have a good banter with and that could hold a conversation. So it's been fun, and I'm learning a lot as I do it, too.

**Mirjam: (14:05)**

Yes, you are amazing. I have to tell you, all the things I do, I'm very impressed because you have your system down, right, and it's working really well for you. And I think, number one, you are committed to your marketing, your PR, your social media. It's all an integral part of how you run your business. And I think that's the first thing that differentiates you from a lot of people in the industry that are looking at marketing more as nice to have. If and when I get or I don't have time, or if my business goes down, then maybe I'll do some marketing. But I think that the golden nugget, really, is that you have to do it consistently and then it's incremental. I mean, it's cumulative. It gets easier, and you get better at it, and you get better results.

**Ariana: (15:07)**

Yeah, I think that to me, my social media marketing could be so much better because I'm just looking at other people and their reels and this and that, and you're constantly doing that comparison game. But I think that's what also keeps me motivated to keep going, because I see how much success these people have had. And I honestly think that I'm the best person for it, as I had at one point thought about hiring a social media marketing agency to do it. But you lose your voice, and I think that's the most important thing because when clients meet you, they want to feel like they already know you. I get a lot of that through people that follow our social media. It's like, I already know your personality. I know how you're going to be. And that is easy for me because I don't have to work as hard in the initial meeting. It's like, it is what it is. Take it or leave it.



**Mirjam: (16:06)**

I do think it's ideal if the business owner, him or herself, can do it if within their wheelhouse.

**Ariana: (16:17)**

Yeah, there are a lot of people just locally, there's a lot of businesses that have asked me, like, what's your approach? What's your plan? What's your strategy? I'm like, I don't have one. I do it from the heart. You kind of do this thing where you serve, serve, serve, provide all this stuff to your clients, and then you say a little bit about marketing for you, serve, and then ask. That's kind of the mentality that I've been kind of doing loosely.

**Mirjam: (16:38)**

I love that. Yeah.

**Ariana: (16:40)**

Mostly it's just explaining our process so that the people that call us know how much time we put into things and can appreciate us. And I think that's what we have lost with, like, Pinterest and all these pretty pictures that people don't give it enough credit anymore, the interior design industry enough credit.

**Mirjam: (16:57)**

So all that said, Ari, what is your best advice for some? Like, if it was you five, six years ago when you first were getting started, what would you tell yourself?

**Ariana: (17:13)**

I mean, I would just do what I did, where it's just like literally put yourself out there and don't be afraid to put yourself out there. And whether it's I called emailed a bunch of builders in my area, and I only heard back from one of them, but they're my best builder that I work with now. It's just putting yourself out there and not being afraid to do that because what is the worst that could happen? They don't respond. And if right now you don't have a good social media strategy, just start by posting at least once a day. Post something that you're really good at. Maybe it's just a flat lay of some fabrics and a really pretty rug, and then you could start talking about, okay, these are lines that our firm carries specifically, and if you're interested in them, we'll give you more information. Contact us through our DMs, things like that. Because I think, like you said, people, when things are good, they don't do any marketing because they're too busy. But that's the worst strategy because as soon as things go down, you're going to have to be playing catch up, catch up, catch up.

**Ariana: (18:17)**

Whereas the people that have been visible the whole time, they're going to be contacted first. It's all about visibility.

**Mirjam: (18:28)**

That's true. In my old corporate days at Kohler, the strategy always was to gain market share when the market is bad, because all of the competition was pulling back in ad spend ads. And Kohler's smart like that because they're visionary and they would take market share from their competition.

**Ariana: (18:40)**

That's the time to ramp up.

**Mirjam: (18:47)**

Same strategy, different types of business.

**Ariana: (18:49)**

Yeah, I mean, it's been in the back of my head because everyone's talking about this looming recession coming and it's like, okay, well, this is not the time to as busy as we are, and I'm already working six, seven days a week. It's not the time to stop writing blog posts. It's not the time to keep putting out content, because I know that it may not be like this forever.

**Mirjam: (19:10)**

It's very true.

**Maria: (19:11)**

Ariana, how do you feel about communicating with the press? Like, how you feel about when you get the opportunity to respond to a question and that kind of thing? Because I feel like people would think that when you're a media darling like you are, that it's a lot of work. Yes, that would be a lot of work. Or that you would feel like that it was difficult. And then what does that really feel like and what does that really look like for someone who gets as much.

**Ariana: (19:17)**

Press as you do? Yeah, I take advantage of the opportunity when a reporter reaches out. And I've made so many relationships being in Miriam's group, that I have these kind of ongoing relationships with these writers that I've met either through horror or through quoted. And every time they reach out to me, I'm stoked. Hey, I'll give you these answers. I usually say, when do you need these by? Because it's rare that they need them the same day. And then I just schedule it in my calendar. I'm going to do this Saturday morning from eight to nine. I can fill this out, give them their info. And I think what makes a difference is I actually get back to them in a timely manner with everything that they ask for. And I don't think people do that. I don't understand why, because it's literally free press and it takes just a very little amount of time.

**Maria: (20:28)**

I'm also surprised at how many of the requests are just looking for photographic examples of concepts like your zero entry shower.

**Ariana: (20:38)**

That job was we were featured in Dwell for that. It was an accessible guest house that we did, and it was a cool project, but it wasn't anything that I would have ever thought that Dwell would pick up. But I think because I just put it out there and said, okay, well, this is what I did, and what do you guys think? They literally went for it so it's just again, it goes back to that not being afraid to put yourself out there because the worst they can say is no.

**Mirjam: (21:06)**

And it's good to have your photo library organized so when these requests come in, then it's easier for you to find the right photo.

**Ariana: (21:15)**

And that's why I think it's best for the business owner to do the marketing if you can, because you're going to have all that knowledge at the tip of your tongue. Oh, yeah, that was the countertop I used. I just remember all of that stuff. Oh, this is the tile that I use. No problem. Instead of having a member of your team do it because they're inevitably going to have to ask you a question of something.

**Maria: (21:38)**

I really appreciate in all that you do that you don't walk around with a lot of excuses for why not to do it, and you don't seem very fearful of failure. Is there anything that you can shine some light on about that you've learned to kind of help other designers see through those two things?

**Ariana: (21:55)**

Yeah, I mean, I think it may seem like I'm not Insecure or comparing myself to other designers where all day long it's a natural thing to do. You see somebody, like, killing it and you're like, that's what I want. But instead of beating myself up over that, it gives me motivation and it kind of inspires me to think, well, if they did it, I could do it. Why not just try? And you may not get that overnight success. Like, everybody wants to be a Studio McGee or Amber Interiors and how much success they've had, and they leverage social media to get that success. Those are very rare examples of what can happen. I'm not saying that's going to happen to somebody that starts posting tomorrow, but at least it gives you some motivation to show that things like that are possible. And the worst position you can be in is too afraid to make a move, even if you're going to fail.

**Mirjam: (22:50)**

That was just the perfect way to close. So, Ariana, thank you so much for coming on. Fantastic. Thank you so much for coming on. We appreciate it. If anybody wants to find out more about you, your business, your podcast, where is the best way to find more info?

**Ariana: (23:15)**

The best way to find more info is our website, So Honeycombhomedesign.com. And then if you want to find us on Instagram, it's Honeycomb underscore home design. And then you'll find our Facebook that way too. And then LinkedIn were on there, Pinterest were on there, so we're everywhere we can be. I can't figure out TikTok yet, so that next time we talk, maybe I'll.

**Maria: (23:36)**

Let you know how to do TikTok. It'll be like a 15 minutes workout and you'll be like, oh, that is so much easier. I had no idea.

**Ariana: (23:45)**

Okay, we'll have to do a talk about it.

**Mirjam: (23:49)**

Then we'll have to catch up on that in a future episode. Yeah, well, thanks everybody for listening. This was Designer Discussions with Ariana Lovato and hopefully we'll see you all back here next week.

**Outro: (24:05)**

Are you ready to get serious about your marketing? We're opening the Designer Discussions Marketing Studio, a monthly series of in-depth actionable content to guide your marketing, PR and business development. We want to help you transform your business and elevate it to work with your dream clients.

We hope you enjoyed this episode of Designer Discussions. What was your takeaway care to share your thoughts and tag Jason, Maria and Mirjam on social media you can find send them on all platforms@designerdiscussions.com. Don't forget to like, subscribe and leave a review or comment for this episode from wherever you are listening.



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